756 *Curanderas* or female witch doctors, for whom no word exists in the Boruca language, are part of the community. However, the lore is handed down from mother to daughter, with the result that the women of certain families are famous for curing powers, whereas other women of the community have none of this learning. Along with a more than general knowledge of herbs, roots, and plant life, the witch doctor must have a therapeutic sense combined with an instinctive knowledge of psychology. For this reason, in spite of the fact that the witch doctor passes her secrets on to all of her daughters, only the one or ones who are lucky enough to have such qualities practise. At times, when there is no female offspring, or when none is suited to practise, the *curandera* has been known to adopt a girl and train her to follow in her trade.

The witch doctors do not receive the same reverence that the *sukias* receive, even though the witch doctors are *Boruca* Indians and have more opportunity to practise on the people. This, and the fact that the witch doctors are women, while the *sukias* are male, may, of course, be the very reason why they are not feared. At times, however, the *sukia* has been known to teach the witch doctor some of his secrets, and it is certain that the *curandera* is highly respected by both sexes. Although the *curandera* is principally interested in female sicknesses, both men and women consult her.

Strangely enough, the most intimate details of the life of a patient are discussed openly with the witch doctor, even in the presence of a member of the opposite sex. Unlike the *sukia*, the *curandera* will accept pay for her services.

● 787 In addition to her use of plants, the witch doctor sometimes employs some form of sorcery to impress her patients. A favorite method is to tie a thread, preferably a silk one, around the little stones called *sukia stones*, which are found in the ancient graves, and to hang them from the hand or from the ceiling of the house. The *curandera* reads the answers to the questions asked her by the patient from the manner in which the stones swing.

● See Pittier, 1891, p. 93.

[p. 26-A]

4:Pittier de Fabrega B-5 (ca. 1900) 1903
SAI9 Talamanca SAI9

willed, "May he let me have the whistle! May he look back into the house!" And as this happened, Sibú ran away and ran on whistling all the while. Meanwhile Sórkura thought he would go and set him an ambush on the path. He took four of his spears and his shield, hung his conch upon a string around his body, and said to his people: "I will go and kill Sibú; when you hear my conch resound, Sibú shall be dead. Then you are to warm up my cacao, as I will soon be back." He then went and waited for Sibú to pass by, and when Sibú came along, he threw one of his spears at him. But Sibú had on the back of his head another ear, which warned him that some one was going to shoot at him. The spear fell noisily on his side. Sórkura made another throw, but without effect. And now Sibú took one of the spears in his hand, and threw it at Sórkura, who received it on his shield. Then Sibú willed, "I will kill Sórkura; may he look over his shield!" Then he took a new aim, and Sórkura was shot just in the middle of his face. And Sibú took the conch, and blew: *Tuú, tuú,* so that the woods resounded, and he cut Sórkura's body into pieces with his knife, and made it into flesh, bones, blood, and bowels, which ever since have been things of ill-omen to us.[1] Sórkura's people waited long, and kept his chocolate warm for him; but he never came back. Sibú had killed Sórkura!

V. THE KING OF THE TAPIRS.

Like the wild hogs and the deer, the tapirs have also their king. Two Bribri went hunting into the woods, each one carrying his bow and arrows. They met with a white tapir, and tried to kill it; but they did not succeed. Both ran after it, but they lost its track, and one of them went astray, no one ever knew how. The other looked for him everywhere, but did not find him. So he went back to his home, where he asked for his companion, and, as he had not come back, everybody thought that he had met with a mishap, and lost his life.

The lost man ran far away behind the tapir until he lost sight of it; then he stood still to rest. Soon his ear perceived the crowing of a cock. He then thought that there was some house near, and, having gone to see, he got to a large *palenque.*[2] He went in, and

[1] Every time the Indians find in the woods leaves sprinkled with blood, or bones and excrement, the origin of which they cannot explain, they see in them Sórkura's relics, and turn away with awe; also leaves having the appearance of being spotted with blood, such as frequently occur in certain groups of plants (*Aracea, Begonia, Columnea,* etc.), are considered to be of the same origin, and are signs of ill-omen for the undertaking they are engaged upon.

[2] Palenque is the *Spanish* or possibly *Nahua* word employed in Costa Rica to designate the large conical houses of the Bribri, who call the same *ú-surl.*

or a possum. There is a well-regulated course which one must adhere to before one can achieve this position. The fee for this is paid to the teacher (who is, of course, a recognized Burier) in foodstuffs, such as pigs, *havas* of yucas, etc. Plus the study, there are twenty-two days of rigid diet when meat, salt, and chocolate cannot be used. After this, the aspirant must act as assistant five times, four of which demand fasting, and for two days of which he cannot use his hands to eat nor to touch his face. The training of the novice begins at four o'clock in the morning when he must bathe with his teacher who is the only person he is allowed to see. He cannot touch another man or woman and must live during this period in a hut of banana leaves which he himself must build. The teacher likewise is not allowed to touch others, and must hand the food to his pupil from afar. This in itself must be in *bijagua* leaves and cannot have contact with the human hand. One of the tests is for the novice to go with the teacher at three o'clock in the morning and cut a staff. Both put a string around one wrist and around each staff. Then the master sticks his pole in the ground and attaches the string to a nearby tree. The aspirant copies this act. If both cuttings grow, it is a sign that the novice will live long and bury many people. If one dies, it is taken for a bad omen. A full-fledged burier must follow a diet the day of and after a funeral. He can eat nothing but plantain (*Dominik*) and wild herbs cooked without salt.

Even the younger generation on the Pacific slope respect the Buriers. The comment of an exceptionally enlightened Bribri, for example, when questioned about the necessity of the Burier at a death was: "This is the custom, as is a law, and one has to do it whether one likes it or not." In 1956, in Salitre alone, there were six Buriers. Ujarrás had three, but could use those from Salitre if their own were not available. At Ujarrás, however, all who assist at the funeral must bathe three days later at four o'clock in the morning. They must also tap the official Burier on the head with *bijagua* leaves.

The Singers. There are no longer Singers except in Chirripó. In the other regions, the medicine man, as stated before, has taken over their functions. The duties of the Singers were

Cabécares, its origin dates from before the birth of the world. At that time, *sibu* owned a staff which in a certain sense was his monitor. It is interesting to note that wooden staffs which are obviously ceremonial have been found in caches associated with the Highland archæology on the slopes of Irazú volcano (fig. 12, *a*).[144] They are a South American trait and are still used by medicine men among the Chocó of Colombia and by tribes in the Amazon basin. In Talamanca itself, chief and medicine man staffs were carved as late as the 19th century (fig. 12, *b*).[145] In Spanish, the medicine man's staff used today (fig. 11, *c*) is known as the *palo de cacique*, its red wood popularly believed to be *cacique* wood. There is a mystical connection between the medicine man and his staff which is supposed to carry his curing power as well as contact benevolent spirits who help him cure. In Bribri it is called *biʒəbLəkərkeLi*. This literally translated means: *biʒəbLə*, a term applied to the songs of the medicine man in the night; *kər* = for; *keLi* = staff. Only the medicine men know where to find this firm wood.[146]

There is still another wooden object used for curing when the patient is in the last stages of an illness and nothing else will work. This is a balsa log on which the medicine man carves with a knife, or makes rude drawings of, certain spirits called *miku* or *mikuʒeké* (*see* Theological Beliefs): a crocodile, snakes, a monkey, a bird, and a skeleton in chains. The subjects seem to depend upon the sickness. Some are the medicine man's spirit helpers while some are malignant spirits who are thought to have caused the disease. This log is placed beside the ill person whose hand is held by the curer or the patient has to sit on it. A chant forms part of this ceremony.

Stones are another very special part of the equipment, the origin of which is also bound up in religious theology (*see* Sacred Songs). A medicine man may have any number of stones but there are two principal ones with a covering name which is sometimes mistaken by laymen as a third stone. This collective

[144] It resembles the one described by Gabb, 1875, p. 520.
[145] Staffs vary in length from three to six feet.

756 a staff of *cacique* wood either by finding one in the forest, by purchasing one from a medicine man, or by receiving one as a gift. This [787] is extremely important because without a staff [776] contact with the spirit, *duLar*, the messenger of *sibu*, cannot be made. Only full-fledged medicine men can talk to *duLar*, but the aspirant must see him alone in the forest with his staff. All claim that this is the worst experience during training as one must be absolutely isolated in the dark in deep forest land. Bit [787] by bit one can feel *duLar* approach. It is then that the novice receives a spirit, taken from someone long dead, to protect him.

The final or initiation ceremony takes place both inside and outside the house of the teacher, and is in truth a trial of endurance. The writer had a chance to witness such an event. The affair began at night and there were five medicine men taking part. A small room of palmito leaves had been built in a corner of the main house by and for the aspirant. This kind of leaf is not essential as banana or plantain can be used. There were two rows of leaves divided by a horizontally placed stick tied at the corners.

In the main room, the chief medicine man, singing and holding his staff, handed, one at a time, the feathers of the macaw, oriole, eagle, [825] quetzal, blue bird (Blue Tanager: *Thraupis Episcopus Diaconus* Lessom), hawk, paraquet, and parrot to the novice who also had his own staff. The young man took the feathers and tied them with a homemade cotton thread to a piece of rolled cloth. All the medicine men held staffs, and during the tying process, one sang to the aspirant while the rest sang to the witnesses who had to answer the song by saying "*ékéké*" (good).

When this was finished, the medicine men sat with their staffs over their shoulders on a [352] low, long bench called by the special name of *sąkure*, because on top of it the stones were later placed. The chief sang to one assistant over a small basket, called *sąbko*, which held the stones. These were wrapped in cotton inside two little *mochillas* or carrying bags. He took them out and gave the basket to the novice who promptly put the feathers in it. The singing continued, interspersed with joking between the medicine men.

[352] On a low, four-legged stool or bench the

756 the largest stone on the bench. Most of the songs referred to certain birds in the woodland. As the aspirant cannot touch the stones until they have been put into his hands, each medicine man took the stones from the center and placed them in the hands of the novice.

[354] It was quite dark, so the first wife made a candle from beeswax, rolling it long, and tore a strip of cloth to wrap around it. When finished, it appeared very much like a licorice whip. She put this candle on the side of the bench so that it lit up everything on it.

The aspirant had had to fast all day within his room. Now two ears of white maize and one raw palmito (which is white) was put inside the room for later use.

At 2:45 A.M. the same ceremony with first chocolate and then chicha was held. This must be done four times during the night. The [801] number four is bound up with all semireligious acts as it is intimately connected with certain histories of *sibu* (*see* Legends). The head man put two pieces of cotton on top of a carrying bag. Then all went to the kitchen house and brought back a white chicken and a white rooster saying, "We are going to serve the feast" to each person. The witnesses answered, "Good." An iron pot containing bananas and palmito was brought in and the same statements were repeated. The first wife took another bundle of leaves from the *tabanco* and the women served rice and chicken in them. Again there followed the ceremony of the cup being changed from left to right.

At 4:00 A.M., two medicine men, including the chief one, went to the kitchen house with the novice, taking some *aiik* leaves. They were followed by the first wife carrying a sick child. This was one of the important steps in the initiation because it showed the aspirant how to go about curing an ill person. The head medicine man took the novice by the hand and together they drew the leaves over the fire so as to soften but not burn them. They fanned the child with the leaves. During this process there was not a whimper from the patient. This was done four times and then the novice repeated it four times alone. The chief man stayed beside the pupil, however, and warned him not to burn the leaves. When ● [787] they crackled and popped as they were being drawn over the fire, it was considered a good

756 sign and that the novice would turn out to be a good curer.
●[787] After the fanning, the group returned to the main house and once more partook of the chocolate, food, and chicha. This time the aspirant took the place of the medicine man who passed the cups and was coached by the chief man.

The head man took a piece of cotton and picked up the pebblelike stones of the aspirant and sung over them. He wrapped them in cotton and put them in a small carrying bag with the largest of the stones on top. He placed this carrying bag in a bigger one and tied it up for the novice. He took another bag and lectured over it to one of the medicine men and then put it around his own neck. The other *jawá* picked up his stones and put them in the two carrying bags from whence they had come, while the chief man did the same with the stones of the others. Finally, he hung the bag belonging to the aspirant around the latter's neck.

[824] A medicine man, acting as assistant, brought the head man five leaves of *poró-poró* (*Cochlospermum vitifolium* [Willd.] Spreng.) who shaped one of them into a cup and put it on the small bench. He put a pinch of Honduras bark, *cáscara amarga* (*Sweetia panamensis* Benth.), on each of the other leaves piling them on top of one another. The rest of the medicine he tied up in a leaf and gave to the aspirant who put it in a carrying bag hanging on the wall. Both then moved to the entrance of the house and the novice went outside. The chief man poured water from a small special gourd into the *poró-poró* cup and the novice had to mix the bark from one of the leaves in it and wash out his mouth. This had to be repeated until the contents of each leaf was used. The medicine left in the carrying bag was to be used in the same way after four days, with the chief medicine man present. On that occasion, the new doctor must talk to the stones also.

When the mouth washing was over, the head man took the carrying bag of the novice from the wall and put it over the latter's shoulder so that it hung down his right side. He proceeded to give the young man two [852] new low benches made of white balsa wood and a white blanket which he wrapped around

758 house. The *pejibaye* has the advantage of thorns to keep innocent children from straying into trouble, as no one except the medicine man is allowed to touch the ill. Water is kept within reach of the sick person by suspending it in a gourd from a long stick.

826 753 Lehmann[147] pointed out that the liver was considered the key to all emotions, sickness, and health. This is still true. The Cabécar phrase for happy or the state of good health signifies that the liver is in good condition.

[774] Lehmann further adds that the activities of the soul are connected with this organ.[148] On the whole, many fevers are supposed to be caused by the liver. Among the Bribri, however, influenza is credited to *bák-namí* (*see* Myths).

164 The principal complaints noted among these peoples are caused by intestinal parasites with subsequent anemia; conjunctivitis, especially among the Bribri; *papalomollo* or Leishmaniosis; and malaria, particularly in Talamanca. Measles, mumps, and at times smallpox and yellow fever also take a heavy toll when they occur in epidemic form.

839 Among the Cabécares, there are numerous cases of male perversion. No social stigma is attached nor is any cure attempted.

278 **Curing.** Herbs, vines, quinine bark, and other medicines prepared from flowers and berries are used.

752 824 A medicine for snake bites is made from *Dracontium Pittieri* Engl. and also from *Aristolochia sylvicola* Standley, which is mashed and cooked. This is combined with the bark of a tree called *bek* in Cabécar and is used to cause sterilization. Diets, as has been noted, form a part of many cures although they are also observed at times of death by the *usegLa* clan. The principal ceremonial and magical elements included in curing are songs (prayers), always sung with the staff and the stones. One of the prayers the medicine men of Cabécar and some of the Bribri sing to combat sickness and to foretell if the patient will live or die is given under the heading of *Sacred Songs*. To rid one of the *wimbLu*, the medicine man sings for three nights and asks *sibu* (*see* Theological Beliefs) not to allow the spirit to scare any more.

757 755 533 [787]

[147] Lehmann, 1920, vol. 1, p. 282.
[148] Lehmann, 1920, vol. 1, p. 282.

755 The stones are also consulted for curing and
● 787 for prophesying the result. When one of the
sią is confronted with a question concerning
[776] the life or death of a person it contacts *sibu*
who sends *duLar*, his messenger, with the
answer. *duLar* is very special, however. No
one, not even the greatest medicine man, has
ever seen him. He confers with the stone and
disappears when the doctor talks to it. Some
medicine men say that they have heard his
presence in the sense that in the dead of night,
when waiting for an answer, there is some-
times a sound as that of a small chick.

784 **Tabus.** *bukLú* is a bad spirit or spirits (*see*
[776] Theological Beliefs). It also denotes uncleanli-
ness and is analogous to tabu[149] in both
[783] Cabécar and Bribri and is of utmost impor-
tance. If one leaves his house alone it becomes
bukLú and if it is his bad luck to return ill,
then it is very dangerous. The only way to
remedy this among the Cabécar is to go all
around the house, touching it with a stick, and
then to do the same to everything inside. The
Bribri do this with their hand. The ceremony
is called *itiuk* (to wake up) in Bribri and
kɨiɔk (to frighten) in Cabécar.

[881] The first menstrual period is particularly
[841] *bukLú* (*see* Puberty) although no woman is
ever free from tabu during this condition. A
[843] pregnant woman is supposedly possessed by
[783] this evil which requires a medicine man to cure
[752] or cleanse after birth. If by malfortune she
should be bitten even by a harmless snake, the
bukLú in her compel her to die.

[825] Vestiges of an elaborate totemic organiza-
[779] [TEXT CONTINUES TOP OF P.47(B)-Analyst]

173 **Recent History—Wars.** A fine line is drawn
926 between legend and actual history. Events are
reflected in both. In 1959, the medicine men
of the Cabécares still recount their version of
war with the Térrabas or Terribís which took
place at the beginning of the 19th century.[150]
The following is an Indian account of this
event.

[TEXT CONTINUES BOTTOM OF P.47(B)-Analyst]

[149] Gabb, 1875, p. 499; Pittier, 1938, pp. 21–22; Skinner, 1920, pp. 102–105.

[150] *See* Gabb, 1875, pp. 488–89. Although Gabb does not mention the Cabécares in this war, it should be

776 stole his child while Thunder was away in the forest. The bereaved father was furious and called *miguchké*, making a tremendous noise. Thunder fought and killed *miguchké*.

Minor evildoers are the *tɵmí* who are both men and women and can be treated collectively or individually. The *tɵmí* inhabit a mountain called *tabatá* near Cabagra on the Pacific side. At times, one can see their clothes drying in the distance, but upon reaching the spot, there are only four large upright stones. The *tɵmí* [825] take care of all animals. The tapir are their cows and the wild pigs and boars their swine. Reports about them come from hunters who have lost their way tracing game. The *tɵmí* do not like men.

Another bad spirit is *orusula*, an enormous pig whose head *sibu* cut off and kept his blood to teach men to beware of him. He lives in the mud of swamps and lagoons and his foam gives [753] people a rash which kills them.

775 There are some important malevolent spirits common to both groups known as the *wimbLu* [774] who are souls of the dead. There is more than one soul per person. One goes to *suLa;* one stays with the bones; and another appears to be the soul that torments the living. If the deceased liked to sing or whistle, his spirit has to do the same and it returns to make itself known to the person who cared most for him in life. It appears on the trail, in the cemetery, [787] makes a noise, and pesters its victim in dreams. [756] A medicine man is needed to rid one of the *wimbLu* (*see* Curing). If he doesn't do this, [753] the person dies.

776 There are also spirit lords of places and fish. None of these are particularly friendly to man.

mikubru lives on Pico Blanco where no one can reach him. His one good deed is to warn when sickness is coming by producing great flames on the summit.

The *ujum* are people who live in the rocks on barren peaks. The Bribri consider them as part of the original population of the earth before man and believe that they are evildoers.

suLášibí today is the name given to a section of land on the Alta Lari near Lagarto or *toLók*. The Bribri believe that before the birth of the sun, *suLášibí* was a person. He was lord of the

[192]

[1] *di* is "water" and *bak* is "stone" in both languages. Jaguar is *krí* in Bribri and *namú* in Cabécar.
[2] *See* Linguistic Texts: *sibu* (sibu) *tsikineL* (born).

*539
538

Sacred Songs

(18) SINGER'S SONG[209]

(*Bribri*)

Now we're going to bring the spirit (*itsṓ*) from where we hid him and when we arrive with him in the house, we'll sing.

(19) *dikúswa*[210]

(*Bribri*)

[755
787] This is a song used by medicine men to fight sickness. It is sung over the sacred stones and in particular over *dikúswa*, to see if the patient will live or die. The meaning of the song is as follows:

In the beginning, *dikúswa* was a bird and *sibu* sent for him when he felt ill and asked whether he would live or die. *dikúswa* answered that *sibu* was only pretending because he would never die. *sibu* was so pleased with the reply that he left us *dikúswa* as a stone for the medicine men to use when curing.

Lay Songs

(20) THE MONKEY DANCE[211]

(*Bribri*)

[535] This song receives its name from the fact that men and women dance it in a line and interlock their arms monkey fashion. The words have nothing to do with the monkey and are a mixture of ancient Térraba, Cabécar, and Bribri.

Freely translated the theme runs:
Water turtle, bad pool,
Someone passed me, dance, dance, dance.
There is the turtle; the turtle's pool;
The devil's pool; bad pool;
Someone passed me; shell pool;
Devil pool, dance; *kúsua* dance;
Beautiful horizon, valiant child.
Dance, dance, dance.

[756]

[209] *See* Linguistic Texts: *biɟəbLə-kək-keLi*. This is today the Medicine Man's song to his staff and takes its name from that of the staff.
[210] *See* Linguistic Texts: Sacred Songs: *dikúswa*.
[211] *See* Linguistic Texts: *buLɜakuLe*.
[212] *See* Linguistic Texts: *duLeɜ; also* The Arts.